



SAILING A SOUND WAVE

Photography by Shaw McCutcheon
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Hi-Fi for the High Seas

So Friday rolls around and you begin contemplating how much fun you can possibly cram into the following two days before your boss drags you back into that incredibly boring routine we call work. Or maybe it's that early Monday-morning class you're sick of. Either way, all too often, weekends are spent on mundane activities—such as shopping or watching football on TV; I guess it's probably because they kill time. But if your name is on the owner's papers of a 38-foot yacht with a killer whale of a sound system, a couple of days can end up turning into a memorable vacation of relaxing, traveling, partying, and jammin' on some great tunes. So whether you're groovin' to the currents or doin' the offshore Macarena (If you haven't heard about the latest butt-grabbin' craze in line dancing, where have you been, man?), when there's no land in sight, peace from annoying neighbors and large crowds is guaranteed. And this is what Chris Walker, owner of a Grand Banks Eastbay 38 Express yacht, has to look forward to on the weekends. So let's have a moment of silence to pity the rest of us landlubbers restricted to life on solid ground.



The Rolls Royce Syndrome

Even among the exclusive group of boats worthy of being called yachts, the handcrafted 38 Express is an engineering standout. It cruises at a speed of 24 knots with a top speed of 28 knots; that's about 32 miles an hour to you and me. Needless to say, this is clearly not a muscle boat; the Grand Banks is designed to cruise, not speed—sorta like a Rolls Royce. The best place on the boat to appreciate its performance is the helm (or where you steer from), which is located on a raised deck that's kinda like a lookout point; that means you can look out as far as the eye can see, or you can look out at the horizon, whichever comes first.

Make That One Tofu Stir-Fry, Please

Once you're inside the luxurious yacht, you'll find everything you'd expect to see in the average home, only nicer, and there are no smelly pets, either. The galley is equipped with an oven, three-burner stove, sink, and refrigerator/freezer—in other words, more than enough equipment to cook everything from a New York strip steak to tofu stir-fry. And when the meal is ready, guests can be wined and dined at the large table in the salon area. There's also a full bathroom on board (or "head" for you nautical know-it-alls); and yes, it's even got a shower. In addition, rich and handsome teakwood is all over the yacht's interior, making the cabin fit for a king, or even you, for that matter.

Even the Sharks Complained

But as gorgeous as that wood is, nothing is as beautiful as experiencing the sun setting over the sea while you're cruising along, mellowing out, and listening to your favorite music. Hey, it's also pretty cool to be able to blast Metallica so unfathomably loud that even the sharks start bitchin' and moanin'. Ya see, the boat owner, Chris, gave designer/installer Paul Silva (an Audio Coupe

owner at the time) free reign on selecting equipment. Chris had only one request: to be able to cruise along at 25 knots and not hear anything but music.

Luke Skywalker's Friend

So Paul went with Pioneer's top-of-the-line Premier Optical Digital Reference series components, including the RS-D2 (not to be confused with Luke Skywalker's robot pal, R2-D2) CD player, the RS-M1 12-disc changer, and the RS-P50 digital-

to-analog converter/equalizer/crossover. The RS-D2 is installed into a bulkhead (a boating term for a dividing wall) in the salon with the changer conveniently mounted inside a nearby cabinet. And for power, Paul's installation team turned to Audison, hooking up three VR 209 115 x 2 amplifiers, each of which drives at least a couple of MB Quart speakers (see below) with plenty of juice to spare.

But since an adequate 12-volt source wasn't available, getting voltage to all of the audio gear required a totally separate custom circuit-breaker panel. (That's right, gearheads, boats have circuit breakers, too—just like houses. Can you imagine being halfway to Bermuda and finding out you've got the wrong fuse?

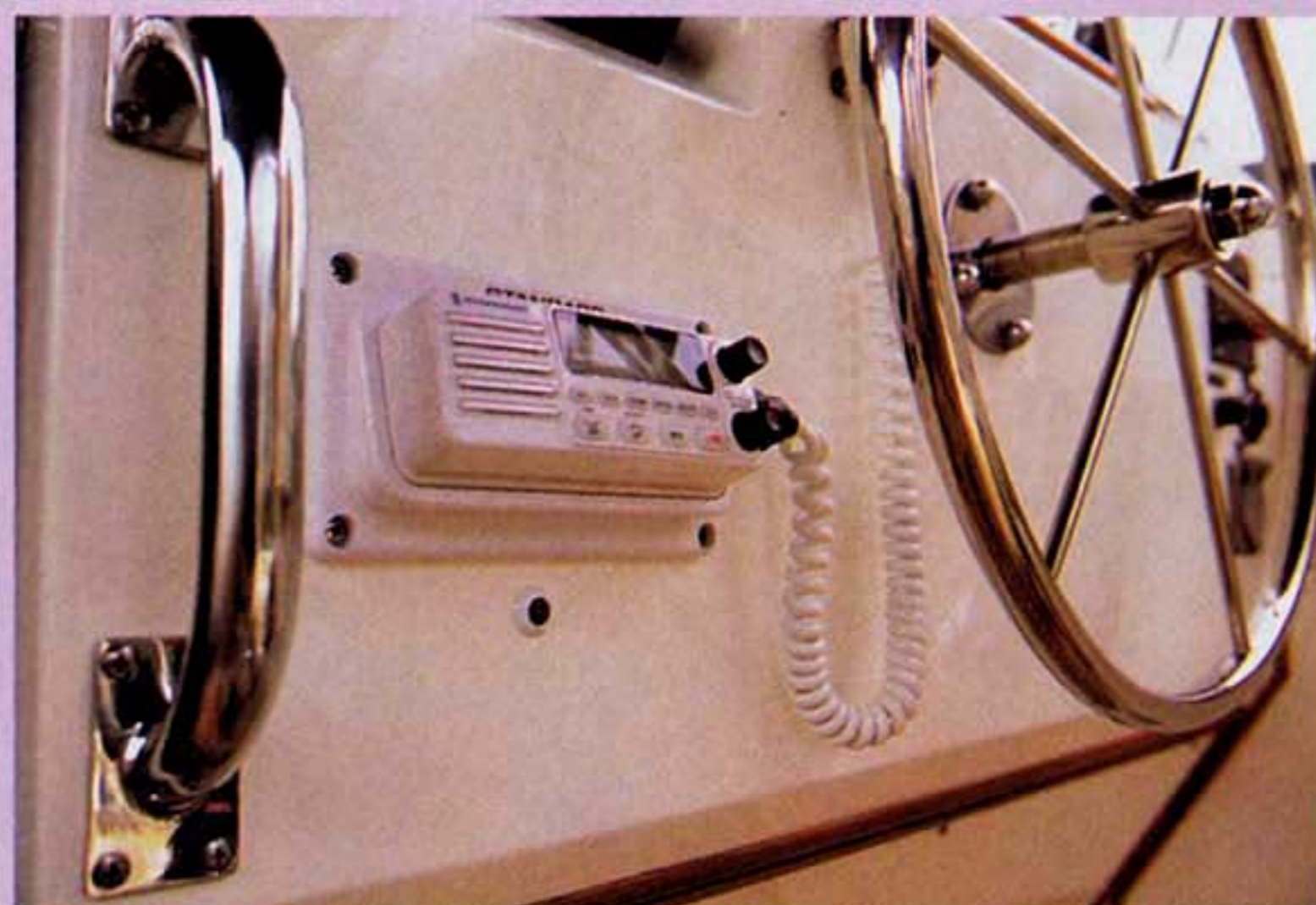
Oops!) Well anyway, once the breaker box for the audio system was built, it was completely relabeled to make it pretty damn obvious which fuses are responsible for which "stuff." The new panel looks totally stock.

After all, yacht passengers certainly don't want to be disturbed while sipping martinis in the ocean air and conversing about hostile takeovers, golf swings, and Cuban cigars.

Get Up off Your Butt

But consider this seemingly useless tangent: Let's say you hop into your car to go for a drive. (Trust me, I'm definitely goin' somewhere with this.) You plop yourself down in your seat, put on your seatbelt, and, assuming all goes

Left: At the helm, a Standard Communications marine radio. Just under the radio, check out that little round thing; it's a Niles MS-1 infrared sensor, which allows for remote system operation on the outside deck. Right: On top, the custom circuit-breaker panel for the audio system. Bottom Right: The AC/status distribution panel.



well, stay safely strapped in until you reach your final destination. So consider this: As difficult as it is to design a car audio system, at least the installer can focus the stereo image on a captive audience who's not gettin' up off their butts and movin' around a cabin or deck, like they'd be doin' on a big boat. Ya see, boat enthusiasts have loads of interior and exterior space to enjoy, so they need to be able to hear music everywhere—whether they're sunbathing on the deck, whale watching from the helm, or enjoying an elaborate meal in the salon. In other words, a stereo system on a yacht has to be an integral part of the vessel, with speakers and audio controls snaking throughout.

Rocking, Shaking, Singing, Swaying

Speakers can be found in three separate areas of the boat. In the salon, there's a pair of MB Quart 160KX 6½-inch coaxials mounted into the bulkhead. The rest of the speaker complement is also MB Quart—a couple of QM218.19 two-way Nautic series component systems designed to be immune to the rocking, shaking, and occasional splash typical of ocean service. The first component set is located in the helm area, so even the skipper can sing and sway to the sound of Smashing Pumpkins. The second set is mounted into two independent exterior walls, known as gunnels, in the rear of the boat. All speakers and components are wired up with Streetwires cable.

Sippin' Martinis

With sound from stem to stern (front to rear of the boat) covered (Bet you didn't expect a lesson on boating terms from *Mobile Sound*, did you?), Paul's next challenge was to figure out how to control the system without having to trek into the salon every time somebody wants to pump up the volume.



'95 Grand Banks Eastbay 38 Express

Length: 37' 11"
Beam: 13' 4"
Draft: 3' 10" (how far—or deep—the bottom of the boat drops into the water)
Water capacity: 360 gal
Fuel capacity: 90 gal
Range: 250 miles
Cruising Speed: 24 knots (approx. 28 mph)
Top speed: 28 knots (approx. 32 mph)
Engine: twin 3208 Caterpillar turbo diesels
Power: 375 hp

After all, yacht passengers certainly don't want to be disturbed while sipping martinis in the ocean air and conversing about hostile takeovers, golf swings, and Cuban cigars. So Paul's job was to design an easy way to operate the system remotely from the outside deck.

Here's how he made it happen. Number one: Keep in mind that the remote-operated Pioneer CD player in the salon does not have the ability to be remote controlled through walls. It's simply not possible. Number two: Smooth, wireless operation requires pointing a remote directly at a head unit's RF receiving eye. Number three: Playing off this principle, Paul installed an RF eye in the helm area. The eye is connected to an RF sending unit in the salon pointed directly at the CD player. And that brings us to number four: The RF sending system, made by Niles (known for their extraordinarily convenient multiroom/multisource products for custom-designed home audio/video systems), takes the remote-control signal received by the helm eye and sends it to the head unit in the cabin. In other words, inside the cabin or outside on the deck, either way, a remote easily controls the system. And as far as *Mobile Sound* is concerned, that is way cool!

Cats & Dogs & Nasty Habits

Installing an audio system in a yacht is about as challenging as building a skyscraper in the Everglades. In fact, the very nature of marine audio is that you're always facing your worst enemy: electrically conductive water. And since water has a nasty habit of getting into places it's not supposed to (not unlike most cats and dogs), all installation connections were heat shrunk to keep the water out. After all, we wouldn't want a comfortable lounge chair to transform into a shock-inflicting electric chair, now, would we?

Another boating-specific electronics obstacle is the inces-



Right: Under the couch in the salon lie three Audison VR 209 115 x 2 power amps, a Pioneer Premier RS-P50 digital-signal processor, and six MB Quart passive crossovers. **Left:** A different angle.

sant rocking, which can cause loose cables to chafe against any of a number of beams, screws, and supports. With enough chaffing, wire can become exposed—a potential problem made more dangerous by the nautical environment. And since nobody wants to be stranded 30 miles offshore because of a Chernobyl reactor-style meltdown in their boat's electrical system, all cable harnessing was wrapped with wiring ties every one to two inches, so it would stay in place.



Left: The salon couch and table. Above: In the salon bulkhead, a Quart coax and Pioneer CD tuner. In the cabinet, the Pioneer changer and remote. Bottom Right: Two different angles of the salon's CD tuner and coax.

As My Great-Grandmother Used to Say

Finally, the audio system isn't the only place you'll find funky electronics on board. There's also a Standard Communications marine radio available so you can chitchat with "the beautiful people" on other yachts cruising by. Of course, it's also nice to have the radio to contact the Coast Guard if, God



forbid (as my great-grandmother used to say), an emergency should ever present itself. And no, forgetting your favorite Pearl Jam disc at home does not constitute an emergency.

Ocean Rules

Heading out into open waters is like visiting another country; the sea has its own way and its own culture. The law of the sea is freedom—freedom to do nothing but go with the flow of the current; freedom to check out sunrises and sunsets without man-made obstruction; and most importantly, freedom to blast your stereo as loud as you damn well please. Now, that's a weekend! ■



GEAR BOX

- (1) Pioneer Premier RS-D2 CD tuner
- (1) Pioneer Premier RS-M1 12-disc CD changer
- (1) Pioneer Premier RS-P50 D/A converter/equalizer/crossover
- (3) Audison VR 209 115 x 2 amplifier
- (2) MB Quart QM218.19 2-way 6½-inch Nautic series component system
- (2) MB Quart 160KX 6½-inch coaxial
- (1) Niles MS-1 infrared sensor
- (1) Niles IRC-1 infrared emitter
- (1) Niles IRP-2+ infrared repeater
- (1) Bass Products custom circuit-breaker panel
- (1) Panasonic 3200 cellular telephone
- Streetwires accessories

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| Equipment: | | \$7,500 |
| Labor: | | \$4,500 |
| Total System Cost: | | \$12,000 |

Audio Coupe

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